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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Examine how India's freedom struggle impacted the art and literature during that phase. (250 words)

23 Aug, 2021 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce by mentioning about India's rich cultural heritage.
- Explain the changes in the style and compositions of art and literature due to the freedom struggle.
- Conclude by giving their contribution in developing nationalism in India.

Introduction

India is known for its rich art and cultural heritage. As society changes, so does art and literature. Origin of great religions like Jainism, Buddhism, the ancient and medieval times were known for its religious influence on Indian art. Similarly, in the modern times, the avant-garde movement rooted in the pride of nationalism, transformed Indian art by bringing 'Swadeshi' values to it.

Body

The freedom struggle brought nationalist fervour and expression to Indian art and literature in the following ways:

Paintings

- The Swadeshi movement of 1905 led to the birth of the **Bengal School of Art** which originated at erstwhile Calcutta and Santiniketan.
In 1906, to oppose the partition of Bengal, **Abanindranath Tagore** painted the **Banga Mata/Bharat Mata** as a voice against western influence. Its four attributes - food, cloth, learning and spiritual knowledge were seen as objects of nationalist goals.
- The paintings were used as a tool to evoke the glorious past of Indian history. An example of such painting is 'The Passing of Shah Jahan' by Abanindranath Tagore as an homage to the Mughal miniature tradition.
- The romanticized style of '**company paintings**' was replaced by Raja Ravi Varma's paintings of Hindu divinities, mythological scenes and Indian life. They were recreated in dozens in his printing press and were distributed in middle class homes all across the country in the form of posters and calendar art.
- **Nandalal Bose** created a series of paintings which invoked and celebrated the spirit of Indian life and indigenous occupations. These posters rejected western material / style and instead, used Japanese calligraphy strokes, natural colours and rural-life scenes. For ex: posters for the Congress Committee's Haripura-meet.

- **The Kalighat style of painting:** Artisans and craftspeople (patua or scroll painters) infused their traditional knowledge with European techniques. They created souvenirs on religious themes (oriental art) mixed with contemporary society-the babu culture (Occidental art).
- Artists like Zainul Abedin created sketches to show the horrific conditions during the Bengal famine of 1943, which was a result of policies of the British government in India.

Music and Literature

The themes of poems, slogans, folk songs, and music shifted to political awareness and social issues, which were earlier based on religion, Sufism and love for their partner.

- Writers and poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya used literature, poetry and speech as a tool to spread awareness against the atrocities by British on Indians and to provoke the thought of freedom to encourage people to fight for the country.
- Birth of novels was closely associated with social reform movements of the 19th century. **Vande Mataram- mantra** of Indian revolutionaries and nationalist leaders was written in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's Bengali fiction Anandamath in 1882.
- Novels were written to re-examine evil social customs and practices like untouchability, caste distinctions, denial of remarriage of widows, etc.

Conclusion

Therefore, these art and literature are hugely significant to the Indian Freedom struggle as they played a pivotal role in breaking British cultural supremacy, rebuilding self-identity and inspiring pride in indigenous practices amidst the masses.